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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the historical background and practical applications of "Interlingua," a language system of common words derived from four control languages. Interlingua and "Esperanto," another artificial language, are compared, emphasizing that international, cross-cultural communication is best served, not by the institution of a universal language, but by the formulation of an auxiliary language that is internationally understood. The paper also stresses that the development of auxiliary language entails linguistic sensitivity and native-language appreciation. (RL)

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INTERLINGUA: AN INTERLANGUAGE

As a student and a teacher of language and culture I have no desire to live in a world where everyone speaks the same language and, as a consequence, views the world around him in approximately the same way. We can be very thankful that the danger of such a world is virtually nonexistent, at least in the foreseeable future. Someone once hypothesized that if there were some means to have everyone in the world start speaking the same language at 6:00 a.m. next Monday morning, by sunset on Friday there would groups of people who would not understand other groups because each geographical area and social group would begin immediately to indivdiualize the language with words and ideas common to the members of that group and to no other.

Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly obvious that we MUST find more efficient means of communication if we are to continue to thrive in a world that grows relatively smaller at an ever more rapid pace. When China sneezes, the Soviet Union shivers and the United States starts taking pills. And while the world grows progressively smaller and more crowded, the amount of knowledge and information needed to keep it functioning increases exponentially.

At the beginning of this century, it was possible for a scientist who could read literature in three languages (German, French, and English) to have access to nearly all important publications in the field of Chemistry, for example, since 93.5% of all scientific work was written in these three languages. In 1966, however, important scientific knowledge in the field of Chemistry was published in 55 languages. Just think of it for a moment. IMPORTANT scientific knowledge was published in FIFTY-FIVE LANGUAGES. And we are considering only the field of CHEMISTRY. Comparable figures can be

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given for nuclear physics, microbiology, aerospace technology, and for almost any branch of scientific knowledge--even for the social sciences such as psychology and psycholinguistics. Almost every country in the world today is publishing information of vital concern to almost every other country, and it is being published in the language of the country in which it originates. To be sure, slightly over half of the scientific and technical literature is still published in English. Russian or German--depending on the particular field--is the second most important language, followed by Japanese and French. But Spanish and Portugese are growing rapidly in importance, and much of the knowledge gained in the countries of Eastern Europe is now appearing in Hungarian, Romanian, Czech, Polish, and even the lesser languages of the Soviet Union such as Georgian. Unpleasant as it is, we must face the fact that the United States is no longer the world leader in a number of technical fields, and hasn't been for the past seven or eight years.

Added to the language problem is the knowledge explosion. Most scientists and technicians are unable to keep pace with the English literature in their own fields of specialization, which, incidentally continue to contract. They haven't the time to learn several other languages nor the time to read the foreign literature even if they knew the language. It is tempting to add another factor to the equation at this point--namely that in this country, at least we are rapidly losing the ability to communicate effectively with one another in our own language, especially in the written language. In our concern for encouraging the individual to express himself as an individual we are in danger of forgetting that any language is effective for communication only so long as the listener and the speaker can agree on what the message is. When

the language becomes so individualized that only the speaker can guess what is meant, then the language is no longer a language but senseless babbling.

Quite aside from our problems of communicating with other speakers of English, however, it is obvious that we are rapidly approaching a crisis in communication on the international level. We have the technical means to process words at fantastic speed, far faster than the eyes, ears, and mind can process them. But information and ideas are worthless if they are not understood, and dangerous when they are misunderstood. We MUST find some means of communication across the international barriers of language and culture, and we must find it soon!

The effort expended to understand the problems and to find the means to build bridges between cultures has been woefully inadequate, but in the case of the language barriers we are in a slightly better position.

The problem is a very old one. Since the destruction of the Tower of Babel we have been faced with the multiplicity of languages, and in every time people have tried to solve this problem, and very often it was political influence that did something to take away the barrier. During the Middle Ages, say from the 10th to the 15th centuries, when science was flourishing in the Islamic lands, the Arabic languages played a large role. This role was later taken over by Latin in the European countries. The dream that English might become the universal language of science seemed well on the way to fulfilment shortly after World War II, but it proved illusive. The search for a universal language has at least proved one thing: no national or ethnic language will suffice.

The solution, at least in theory, appears to be not a universal language but an internationally understood auxiliary language.

Although interest in an auxiliary language is very old, serious work in the field of interlinguistics began little more than a century ago. Despite this relatively brief history an enormous number of auxiliary language systems has been proposed. The number of users of these systems, however, has generally been very few. The wits have observed that in the vast majority of cases only the inventor and, if married, his or her spouse practiced the language. Reference works therefore tend to dismiss the entire subject with a few words. The general public has had ample justification for the assumption that interlinguistics is something of a game indulged in only by the overly eccentric. Several hundred systems have been proposed, most of them the exclusive property of their authors and many of them nothing more than a name even to those familiar with the field.

The modern history of interlinguistics begins in 1880 with Pastor Johann Schleyer's VOLAPÜK which managed to gain hundreds of thousands of adherents within a few years. VOLAPÜK was in many ways little better than the excessively theoretical and impractical approaches that had preceded it. It was a synthetic system with four cases (including the vocative) in its nominal declension and a verbal conjugation that rivaled the legendary complexity of Classical Greek. Its vocabulary was derived by deliberately mutilating and truncating words from different source languages in such a way as to make them unintelligible to everyone: for example, lol for 'rose', nim for 'animal', Melox for 'America', plim for 'compliment,' etc. That this system could have attracted any followers whatsoever seems remarkable; it is nothing short of astounding that it was in fact the first unqualified success of interlinguistics.

Probably its success can be attributed to the fact that it was a challenge to the nationalism that was rampant in 19th century Europe. Then, as now, language was recognized as the single most important characteristic of nationalism, and VOLAPUK was the first truly neutral language. On this point, if on few others, all subsequent generations of interlinguists have found themselves in total agreement: no national or ethnic language can serve as the interlanguage because of the implications of political and/or cultural hegemony implicit in such a preeminent position.

VOLAPÜK's heyday was brief, and in 1887 Dr. Ludwig Zamenhof's ESPERANTO began to win the allegiance of those who were formerly under the aegis of Schleyer. Like VOLAPÜK, ESPERANTO was neutral, but it was more attractive because it was much less the arbitrary and idiosyncratic creation of one individual. Zamenhof used already existing roots as much as possible, and the result was a lexicon that was more than 50% Greco-latinate in origin. The characteristic of familiarity was added to the positive feature of neutrality.

If the selection of international roots guaranteed familiarity, it was equally true that the regularity and enforced simplicity of ESPERANTO rendered it a difficult and obscure tongue. It recognized no variations in spelling or pronunciation; its orthography was uniformly regular (one sign--one sound); its lexicon was deliberately small to facilitate rote memorization; it tended toward the principle of homosemia (one concept--one word); and, perhaps most significantly, its generative powers were extremely limited and word formation was rigidly structured.

Zamenhof himself was sufficiently dissatisfied to propose modifications in 1894 but was overruled by a majority of his followers. At the Paris conference on the interlanguage at the beginning of the 20th century

efforts were made once again to reform ESPERANTO, but the result was schism, and splinter groups broke away and became distinct schools within the camp of proponents of a schematic interlanguage. The most important of these were IDO and NOV-ESPERANTO.

MUNDO-LINGUE by Julius Lott and Edgar de Wahl had been published in 1889 but attracted little attention. Around 1905 came IDIOM NEUTRAL and, in 1910, under the direction of Guiseppe Peano, it became the Academia pro Interlingua with its efforts directed toward developing LATINO SINE FLEXIONE.

Meanwhile, de Wahl persisted in his conviction that the interlanguage already existed and that the task was to extract its words from the contemporary languages of Europe. His OCCIDENTAL (later called INTERLINGUE) was published in 1925. It stressed the principles of "naturalness" and "regularity," the latter induced by suppression of duplicate stems and variant spellings. This "regularity" may account for the less than enthusiastic response to this new system, but his stress on familiarity was a major contribution.

Many believed that the epoch of language invention was drawing to a close. Accordingly, in 1924 the International Auxiliary Language Association was founded for the purpose of "inducing rapprochement and gaining consensus for the formulation of the interlanguage." Rather than seeking to implement a predetermined linguistic philosophy, the IALA sought to consolidate the gains already made, to derive the best features from the various systems, and to eliminate those elements detrimental to the progress of interlinguistics. This tolerance for rival systems was evident in the selection of the linguists who directed the efforts of the IALA; they included Esperantists, Occidentalists, and, finally, the late Dr. Alexander Gode von Aesch who was primarily responsible for the formulation of the INTERLINGUA of the International Auxiliary Language Association.

With the publication of INTERLINGUA in 1951 the work of the IALA was completed. The association was disbanded and its members devoted their efforts to the promotion of this new system. Actually, INTERLINGUA hardly seemed like a new system, even to those who had never heard of it. Some of the reasons for its familiarity are: 1) INTERLINGUA'S vocabulary contains only words which were already international in scope, appearing in corresponding forms and corresponding meanings in three of the four control languages: Italian, French, English, and the combination of Spanish and Portugese. Strictly speaking, a word may appear in only two of the control languages if it also appears in either German or Russian. 2) The International Scientific Vocabulary, mostly Greco-latinate in origin, had already made a great amount of technical terminology international in scope. 3) INTERLINGUA was guided by the principles of the naturalist school and was in fact to be considered as a variant and refinement of de Wahl's OCCIDENTAL. 4) It incorporated the successful elements of all the previous 75 years of development. The guiding principle of INTERLINGUA was familiarity. It was conceived as the interlanguage least foreign to the greatest number of people in the world, and it was intended to be read by educated persons virtually at sight, without need of instruction or dictionaries, with maximal fluency after minimal practice.

It has been suggested that neither ESPERANTO nor INTERLINGUA is truly neutral since they do not incorporate Oriental or Arabic words or grammatical features. Both these inter languages are essentially Greco-latinate and thus remain "occidental," it is argued. It is also argued that if familiarity is one of the desiderata of an interlanguage the lexicon must necessarily be small indeed, for how many words are common to, say, Chinese, Arabic, and English?

Although maximal penetration of words such as "blue jeans" and "Coke" may guarantee both neutrality and familiarity, the implication behind these questions, namely that there could be a single interlanguage equally acceptable in all parts of the globe is incredibly utopian, perhaps quixotic. In spite of the behavioral scientists who view all languages as but separate manifestations of one single and undifferentiated human potential, we are no closer to man's "natural" language than was Herodotus.

The field of interlinguistics today is limited to the schematic and the naturalist camps, with ESPERANTO and INTERLINGUA occupying preeminent positions. It is claimed that ESPERANTO is more easily learned than any other foreign language because of its simplicity. But INTERLINGUA is NOT a FOREIGN language to anyone within the European tradition. Both ESPERANTO and INTERLINGUA are European languages, but it flies in the face of reason to suggest that the modern European interlanguage should be "regularized" to the extent that Europeans cannot read it without the aid of a dictionary. Is it not paradoxical that Eurpoeans should have to study a European interlanguage in order to use it?

The test of any interlanguage lies not in its theoretical foundations but in its usage. ESPERANTO is accessible only to those who have studied it. INTERLINGUA, on the other hand, has sought to become an interlanguage that nonlinguists too can adequately comprehend without undue effort. INTERLINGUA has already been applied successfully in sociology, demography, molecular spectroscopy, botany, and especially in medicine. It has also been used successfully in literature. As of March, 1974, INTERLINGUA had been used in 11 world congresses and 28 scientific journals. Spectroscopia Molecular is a monthly journal published entirely in INTERLINGUA by Dr. Forrest Cleveland since 1952. It boasts a prestigious

list of suscribers in 27 countries, including Nobel Laureates, national academies of science, libraries, universities, research institutes, instrumentation laboratories, abstracting services, publishers, and individual spectroscopists.

The Multilingual Compendium of Plant Diseases published in 1976 includes descriptions in Interlingua of 325 of the word's most destructive diseases of 57 economic crops.

The most extensive application of Interlingua to date is in the exciting new course in general language skills in the Swedish secondary schools, or Gymnasien, which provides an optional alternative to the former compulsory three years of Latin. One of the three texts used in the course is Ingvar Stenström's Interlingua: instrumento moderne de communication international (Stockholm, 1972).

The dropping of compulsory Latin in the classical gymnasia of Sweden is, without question, a sharp break with tradition. It constitutes an admission on the part of rather conservative educational establishments that the bulk of their students will not need to read either classical or medieval Latin after leaving school. There was general agreement that a disproportionate amount of time was being spent upon Latin, especially in a world where daily evolution of technology makes increasing demands upon the student's time. Still, it was recognized after inquiries among representatives of commerce, industry, and the universities that, even if direct access to literary, historical, and philosophical texts in the classical languages is necessary for only a few students, some basic knowledge of Latin (and, to a lesser extent, Greek) principles of word formation remains essential for all of them. The historical role of the Latin language, too, in the cultures of Europe simply could not be neglected.

But a substitute course was desirable for a more positive reason, also, because "parts of the syllabus of Latin must be looked on as very sound and useful knowledge even for the general student, not only for the classical specialist, and could serve as a very helpful background for the study of the modern languages, including the national tongue, Swedish."

The result was a course with two purposes:

1) to treat that part of Latin and of Greek which still functions as an every-day ingredient of Western languages in general vocabulary, in scientific terminology, and in the form of proverbs and quotations, and

2) to cultivate sensitivity for the functions of language and to impart knowledge of the cultural-historical role of the classical languages.

By acquainting the student with those most common morphemes which generate the international words of the European languages, the course strives to refine his linguistic sensitivity so that he will be able to analyze compounds and recognize the Greco-latinate bases even when they occur under different forms in several national languages. In fact, there is probably more emphasis in this course upon the processes by which neologisms are created and become a part of contemporary language than there is upon the cultural-historical role of the Greco-Latin tradition of the past. It is in this area that INTERLINGUA is especially useful because it presents the materials from several European languages all at the same time.

When I try to help students understand and remember German words by showing them how the English and the German word developed from the same Germanic root, or how both are derived from Latin, for example, I find that most of the students are fascinated to discover that despite certain differences in spelling, or sound, or even meaning, the German and the English words are

now clearly recognizable as the same word. The same is true when I point out that many structural features of German have their exact or similar counterpart in English. It occurs to me that if we could give young people the opportunity to become fascinated with the way in which their language works, to learn how they unconsciously manipulate it to form new words or express new ideas, to see how that horrendous monster called "grammar" is really only the sometimes arbitrary but usually logical methods which speakers of English down through the centuries have developed in order to communicate with one another and to express their individual personalities in mutually understandable form, our students might then be more interested in learning how to use their own and other languages correctly. If we could concentrate on arousing the awareness of their own language, could break through the conditioned reflexes and make them aware of what they and others are doing when they communicate through language, there would then be plenty of time to help them learn how to put language to the most effective and pleasant use--after they have decided they WANT to learn these skills. Then, perhaps, they might even be receptive to the idea of an auxiliary language through which they could communicate, at least on a limited level, with speakers of other languages. They MIGHT even learn to love learning languages--their own as well as those of other nations.

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Example of INTERLINGUA
from the
Multilingual Compendium of Plant Diseases

Iste maladia se manifesta como minute areas de cortice morte in conjunction con gumma, le quales partialmente se cura, lassante un vulnere o un cicatrice. In attaccos sever, extensive areas de cortice mori e le ligno que se trova intra es anque nigrate e morte. Le fructos monstra un poc de discoloration e un augmentation de flexibilitate al pedunculo. In breve tempore le pelles sembla esser coriacee, con un brun discoloration aquose. Iste symptomas frequentemente se avantia super le pelle in gruppamentos large e obscur, le quales corresponde al divisiones interne del segmentos del fructo.

This disease occurs as small patches of dead bark accompanied by gum, followed by partial healing, leaving a wound or a scar. In severe cases large patches of bark are killed, and the wood underneath is blackened and killed. The fruit exhibit a slight off-color and incresed pliability at the stem which is soon followed by a leathery condition with a brown water-soaked discoloration. These symptoms often progress over the sides in wide dark bunches corresponding to the division of internal segments of the fruit.

Miller, Paul R. and Pollard, Hazel L., *Multilingual Compendium of Plant Diseases*. St. Paul, Minnesota. Produced and distributed by the American Phytopathological Society for the U.S. Agency for International Development in cooperation with the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1976. (457 pp. $35)

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